

Minutes of the Board of Finance Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget 2014-15  
April 30, 2014 – High School Auditorium – 7 p.m.

Members of the Board of Finance present; Justin Donnelly, Joseph Sangiovanni, Chris Childs, Brian Kost, Ryan Anderson, alts. Tracy Eccles, Eric Harrington, Michal Stevens  
Absent: Scott Lingenfelter Also present: Director of Finance Deborah Cerrato

Chairman Justin Donnelly called the Hearing to order at 7 p.m. He led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then read the Legal Notice of the Public Hearing as printed in the Journal Inquirer. He reminded the residents of the Town Meeting scheduled for May 14, 2014 to vote on the proposed budget.

Chairman Donnelly introduced the members of the Board of Finance and Secretary to the meeting.

Chairman Donnelly then reviewed the proposed budget; copies of the presentation were available to those attending. He reviewed the Expenditures: General Govt. Operations, \$14,422,176 and noted the budget for the Board of Education totaled \$32,339,367. He noted that if we had not had Revaluation, we would have had a decrease, but the Grand List went down by 6% and noted that Suffield has a residential base for the Grand List. He then reviewed the Revenues; noting that the increase would change the mill rate from 25.16 to 27.05 mills.

The Board of Education's budget of \$32,907,376 was reduced by capital expenditures removed from the their budget to Capital Expenditures Budget for 4 new trucks (\$28,000) and Chrome Books (\$190,000); the Board of Finance reduced the BOE Budget increase request by \$350,000, the adjusted BOE Budget Request is now \$32,339,376. He then noted the Major Capital Expenditures.

Mr. Donnelly then introduced Mr. Bob Eccles, Chairman of the Board of Education and Ms. Karen Baldwin, Superintendent of Schools for the BoE presentation of their budget. Mr. Eccles then reviewed the time line of the budget process from the submittal to the BoF through April 21. He noted that the increase requested by the BoE was \$1,051,128 as of March 31, and did note that the BoF removed capital items to the Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures (ACCE) budget as of April 16. The proposed remaining increase was now \$833,128. The BoF reduced the BoE requested increase by \$350,000. After a BoE expense increase of \$479,579 for Employee Benefits Expense, the increase would leave a remaining amount for all other school district cost increases of \$3,549.

Ms. Baldwin reviewed in detail, the plans for program improvement and noted the goals for the school district. Copies of this presentation were also made available to those attending the Public Hearing.

The Chairman noted that we are not reducing the BoE Budget; we are reducing the amount of the proposed increase asked for by the BoE. We are down 150 students since 2009. The enrollment has declined. The spending should decline. Our reduction is only in the amount of increase requested by the board. It is not a cut to the BoE Budget.

Questions for the Board of Finance:

Scott Guilmartin, 759 Hale Street - How much is the increase is going to be directed toward hiring more administrators?

Chairman Donnelly, BoF, stated that the Board of Finance cannot cut specific line items in the BoE budget; the BoF can only reduce the total number. Mr. Eccles stated None. We have not been adding administrators. There are no new administrators to be hired in this budget.

Melissa Finnegan, 41 Sunny View Drive- How did the Board of Finance come up with the number for reducing the BoE budget?

BoF member Eric Harrington noted that it brings it in line with CPI.

Denny Kreps, 709 Newgate Road- Why is there an increase in taxes? What are you doing with the Capital Fund. What is the status of our Fund Balance.

Mr. Kost - We transferred funds from completed unspent projects. Approximately, \$1.7 million back into the Capital Budget (ACCE) budget. We are taking \$1 million out of Fund Balance, and restoring \$500,000 back into the Insurance line item.

Ben Rodriques, 560 Thrall Ave. - \_ He noted the \$3,549; that won't be able to cover expenses. Did the BoF agree to this amount? Mr. Kost replied that he was one of 2 votes against the presented budget.

The First Selectman arrived at 7:50 p.m.

The Chairman noted that the BoF has no control over line items. He also noted that both the BoF and the BoE did not approve their budgets by a unanimous vote of their boards.

(BoE 7-2 vote), (BoF 4-2 vote)

Kate Reitburg -Devine Road – It was her understanding that the enrollment has declined 2%. The BoE budget is increasing. If your enrollment has declined, why are you not at least holding the line on expenses.

BoF member Ryan Anderson – I look at this on a per pupil basis. If you look at last year, we spent \$13,879 per pupil. This year we are spending \$14,318 per pupil in the proposed BOE budget, a 2% increase.

Warren Packard, Oxford Drive- When was this budget presentation information available for the average taxpayer to look at the documents?

Ms. Cerrato – It was on line Monday in accordance with the Charter.

Mr. Packard stated that this time frame is not sufficient, more time is needed for the citizens to read, Did you cut the Selectman's budget by \$150,000? And that \$140,000 was from insurance.

Mr. Donnelly stated that the BoF also cut \$10,000 from the First Selectman's budget salary line item by a voted motion. Mr. Childs stated that because the Board of Selectmen as a whole, had not reviewed the recommended cuts, we used the \$140,000 as a place holder, from the Insurance.

Comments:

Kris Karam- 48 Apple Lane- There have been 6 new administrators in the past few years. Do not cut teachers over administrators. We should spend more on teachers.

Krystal Holmes, 42 Michael Lane – She stated that there is a full time Clerk for Public Works and a full time Administrative Assistant for the Selectmen, Parks&Recreation Dept. needs a full time secretary.

Tom Frenaye – Warner Town Road – School roofs are being re-imbursements; not mentioned in the BoF as revenue. Of the increases in the budgets, most went to male members of the Staff. Maybe a better process is needed. Cuts are not necessary with a large Fund Balance. We have approximately \$10 million when you include the Capital Non Recurring Expenditure Fund; the cuts are not necessary for the BoE. Amounts were not included in the budget submission for the school roof projects.

\_Glynn Gazdik, 137 Silver Creek Dr., How can the budget follow CPI? Healthcare costs are going up more than 1.5%, which is CPI. Brian Kost responded that the benefit is a generous plan for the Town and BOE employees.

Dan Tapper,-9 Countryside Lane–Why did the BoF consider cuts in the BoE budget.

BoF member Ryan Anderson - Once an increase is passed, it is in the budget forever, now we have a 2% reduction in enrollment. Spending can get out of control.

This is time to put the brakes on the spending.

Gordon Stagg- N. Stone Street – I am interested where the BoE is planning to cut. Is that teachers or administrators. I am disappointed about the BoE; by not telling us where the cuts will be.

G. Beiter – S. Main Street – I am a member of the BoE. I did not vote for this budget.

The last thing I would propose would be to cut teachers. Our teachers do a tremendous job. I do think there are other places to reduce this budget.

Tracy Eccles responded to the CPI discussion that municipalities are different because of the unions. We will need to find efficiencies & possible cuts within the budget.

Lynda Cunningham – Union contracts drive the expense. But you can't blame the unions.

Paul Casinghino-205 Halladay Ave – The teachers union did accept a high deductible program. He is baffled by the increase.

Kim Worthington – There is declining school enrollment. Demands have increased because of Common Core.

Michelle Zawawi - 55 Devine; I am a Board of Education member, I am a teacher, I support the teachers. What is not discussed is the increase in grants.

Jeff Bernabe – I am baffled why we are discussing this when it is a tax cut.

Mr Kost - I believe the School Board should show where the cuts would be in their budget. I think you should remove the place holder in the insurance line item and the Selectmen have to get together and decide. We should know just where the cuts are going to occur.

Mr. Donnelly – We have a Special Meeting Monday, May 5. The BoF needs to have any new information to consider by Monday.

Michael Smith 22 Foxmeade Dr. - How have health benefits been negotiated? Is there a defined contribution program?

Mr. Eccles answered his concerns. Inflation, unfunded mandates, less State funding drive the increase. Mr. Eccles indicated that the increase between the 3 Administrator positions, that were formerly teachers is less than \$10,000 for all three.

Chairman Donnelly stated the process that would take place, if the proposed budget was turned down at the May 14 meeting. At the Town Meeting at which residents vote, motions can be made to reduce the budget; but not add to the budget. The BoF will hold a Budget Review Meeting Monday, May 5, in the Town Hall at 7 p.m.

Chairman Donnelly thanked the residents for coming out and expressing their concerns. The Public Hearing was adjourned at approximately 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Bobbie C. Kling, Secretary

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